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PART

DEPT.

EASTERN

TITLE: **GENERAL:** Political Affairs - Internal
Political Parties in the Middle East
BA'ATHISM

File No. E 11

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E	REG. R271	K.C.S.
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FILE No.

PART

26.8.68 | 17-10-'68

E 1/1

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Reference.....

①

Assessment
--- 19/8

Mr MacRae (Eastern D)
Mr Elwell, IRD,
Mrs Sandy, IRD

The many faces of Ba'athism

RECEIVED IN
ARCHIVES No. 15
26 AUG 1968

E11

I should be glad of
comments or amendments
on the attached draft.

J. Halim
19. 8. 68

I have been exercised myself about the
problem of labels (or faces, perhaps.....); and
welcome this effort to agree on a more
sensible set. The only doubts I have is over
the term 'Reform Ba'athists' (p.3), to the extent
that Salah al Din Bitar was, I believe, actually
at the 1967 Ba'ath Congress in Beirut; and
Afkar has been endorsed it. So that being,

the founders and apostles of Orthodox
Ba'athism, and now by their definition
be called Reform Ba'athists - not least
since they actively support the new Syrian
opposition National Front which comes
out in practice precisely the policy of
the sharing of power. However, I do not
think ~~that~~ it is necessarily inconsistent
to say that many of the orthodox
Ba'athists, including its founder members,
have now become Reform ba'athists
— provided we all agree what we mean
about this.

Agnew, 19/8.

Thank you for letting us have
sight of this. We have no amendments to
suggest.

V. Goodchild

20/8
(I think that "orthodox" and "reform" are satisfactory
adjectives to distinguish the traditional from the current
trends in Ba'athism. I'm not so sure about describing the
Syrian group as "neo-Ba'athist." If they are to be seen as further
left than the 'reformists', how about "radical" Ba'athists?

But they are
not always
so Jim
21/8

22/8 Charles 21/8

Registry
No.

EP
EP (?)

DRAFT letter

RECEIVED IN
ARCHIVE
22 AUG 1968

Type 1 +

SECURITY CLASSIFICATION

Top Secret.
Secret.
Confidential.
Restricted.
Unclassified. A

PRIVACY MARKING

In Confidence

To:—

A. E. Saunders, ~~Gen.~~
Baghdad.

From

D. J. Makinson
Telephone No. & Ext.
x 737
Department
Eastern

The many faces of Ba'athism

Recent events in Iraq have led to the use of a variety of phrases to describe the different forms of Ba'athism as they appear in Iraq and Syria. Relative terms such as "left wing" or "right wing" can be misleading, and it might be useful to rehearse the history of the party, and consider terminology. I should be grateful for your views.

2. The Hizb al Ba'ath al Arabi (The Arab Resurrection Party) was founded during the last war by two Syrian schoolmasters, Michel Aflaq, a Christian, and Salah al Din Bitar. ^(a Sunni Moslem) It is possible to trace a continuing pattern in the ideology preached by these two; and despite accusations by other Baathist splinter groups, it is logical to call Aflaq and his supporters orthodox Ba'athists. One point worth interjecting is that the party was dedicated to the resurrection of the Arab; but in the view of its founders, reared on political debates at the Sorbonne, and early impressed by Marxism, that resurrection could only come in one way. The great landlords and rich merchants, with their vested interest in the maintenance of Western imperialism, must be destroyed. Orthodox Ba'athism is by definition a doctrinaire, revolutionary form of extreme socialism, which advocates, for example, the nationalisa-

Copy:

J. Sanders,
Beirut.

D. Crawford,
Amman.

Extra copies:

(do not mark this
distribution on
the letter)

Mrs. Elwell, IRD

JRD

Mr. Moore

Mr. Evans

Mr. Peasley

Mr. Butler PUSD

Mr. Pridham, IPD

Mr. Macrae
Eastern Dept.

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tion of land and other resources. It is its doctrinaire quality which has marked it throughout its development, and which has made it unwilling to compromise, made it difficult for it to co-operate, and has meant that it lacked allies. There have been times, as in Iraq in the Summer of 1963, when the orthodox were more extreme than their rivals; there have been times, as in Syria in 1965-8, when the breakaway Ba'athists were more extreme than the orthodox.

3. The divisions within the Ba'ath have been obscured by personal rivalries and struggles for power, but it is possible to attempt to label those who have preached Ba'athism first and politics second. Prominent among them in Iraq was Saleh Mehdi Ammash, who is reputed to have recruited Ahmad Hassan al Bakr & Hardan al Takriti into the party. In the present cabinet therefore we have an orthodox wing, which preaches the Aflaq form of Ba'athism, and whose apostle is Ammash. It may be that Bakr and Takriti will try to avoid making the mistakes they made when they were in power in 1963, and may be more willing to compromise in order to remain in power. Such a course could well bring them into conflict with Ammash.

4. In 1967 a Ba'ath Congress of the Pan-Arab command of the (orthodox) Ba'ath

Bakr

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- 3 -

was held in Beirut. It laid down guidelines for a changed policy vis-à-vis other "progressive" groups (but no change in ideology) by which it was prepared, once back in power, to share that power with, for example, Nasserites and Communists. We might, I suggest, call these who practice this policy the Reform Ba'athists, and it may be that Bakr and Takriti, who have released the Communists, perhaps to win their support, will deserve this label.

5. The splinter regime in Syria, at present to the left of orthodox Ba'athist policies (though not, be it noted, of its doctrine) could then be called Neo-Ba'athist.

6. It was Ali Saleh al Sa'di who was mainly responsible for the bloody excesses of Ba'ath rule in Iraq in 1963. It is doubtful whether he can claim to be a Ba'athist now - he was expelled from the party in 1964 - though he was Secretary General in 1963. If he has a following it is sure to be extreme, but more likely to be personal than political.

7. We recognise that these labels are arbitrary, but they have a constant value, and seem to us to avoid some of the difficulties of current terms. We should be glad to have your views.

DM
2/8

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BP

FOREIGN OFFICE, S.W.1.

27 August, 1968.

The Many Faces of Ba'athism

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A.E. Saunders, Esq.,
Baghdad.



-2-

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7. We recognise that these labels are arbitrary, but they have a constant value, and seem to us to avoid some of the difficulties of current terms. We should be glad to have your views.

(D.J. Makinson)

c.c.

J. Sanders, Esq., Beirut.

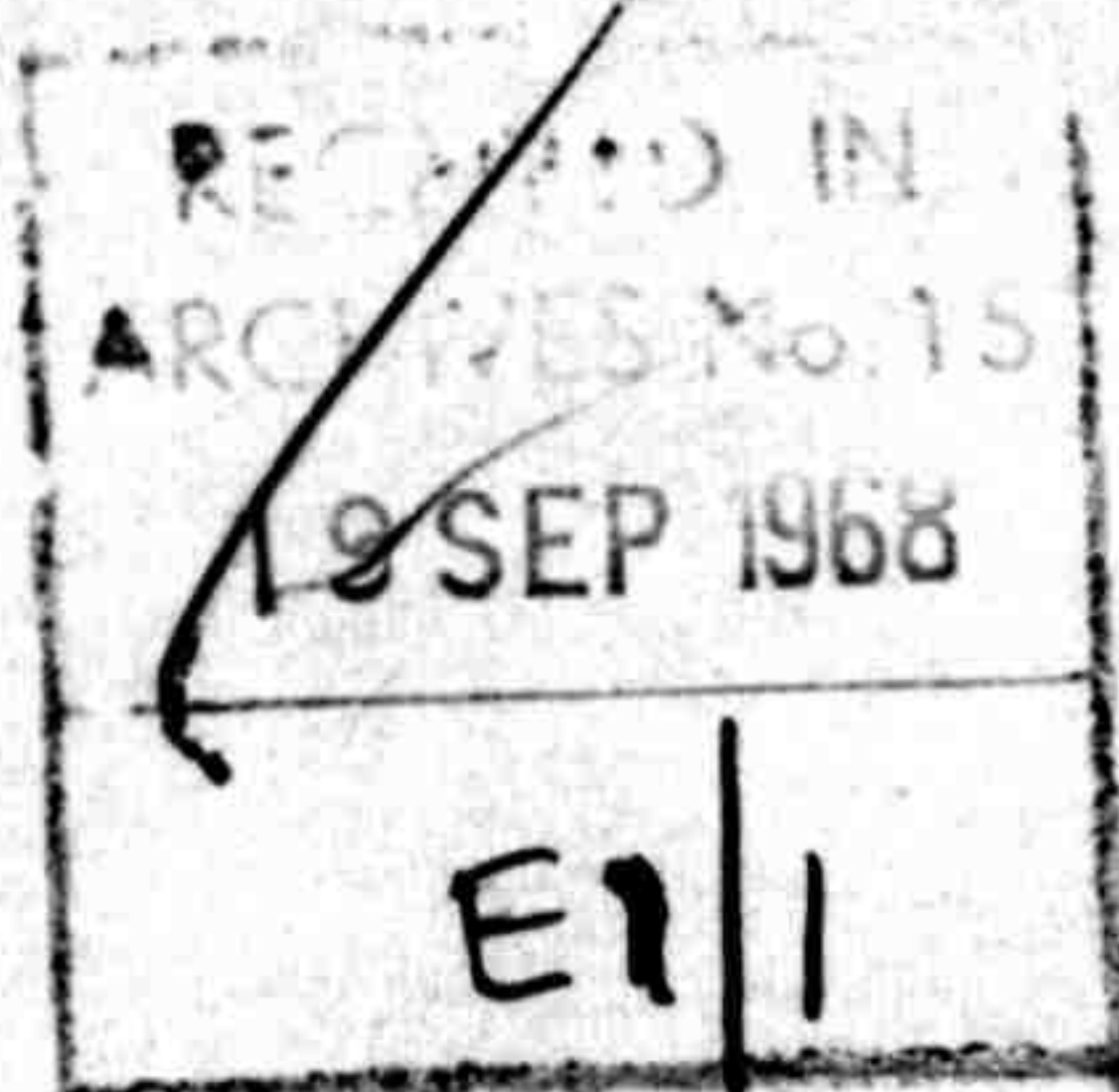
D. Crawford, Esq., Amman.



BRITISH EMBASSY,

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RESTRICTED
(2/45)



BEIRUT.

Am 18/9

11 September, 1968.

*Mr. MacRae,
Reg. Good!*

Am 18/9

p.a. Am 19/9

Dear Makinson,

My only comment on your letter E 1/1 of 27 August to Bertie Saunders in Baghdad about nomenclature for the Ba'ath is to say that "pseudo-Ba'ath" would be more accurate than neo-Ba'ath for the present mob in Damascus. I hope it is clear that, so far as the Syrians are concerned, ideology has long been sunk under straight lust for power and for Alawi revenge on the Sunnies. This is certainly true of the military. Though ideology may play some part in the thinking of the civilians and consequently in their legislative and administrative action, the sources of power in Syria use a so-called Ba'ath ideology more as slogans than as a programme for action, and the party machine as their Tammany Hall. However, I have no objection to Reform Ba'ath and Neo Ba'ath as convenient labels, perhaps less misleading than the nomenclature which has grown up so far.

2. I am sending a copy of this letter to Saunders in Baghdad and Crawford in Amman.

John Sanders

(J.L.Y. Sanders)

D.J. Makinson Esq.,
Eastern Department,
FOREIGN OFFICE.

UNCLASSIFIED

4

1/4



BRITISH EMBASSY,
BAGHDAD.

21 September 1968

Reg 2 p.a.
Jm 26/9

Dear Sir,

The Ba'th

You are expecting a reply to your letter E 1/1 of 27 August.

2. I hope to let you have it by the next bag.

Yours truly

A. E. Saunders

(A. E. Saunders)

D. J. Makinson, Esq.,
Eastern Department.



Mr. Makinson O/R

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A thought & interesting letter. (5)
I am not sure where it came
the present Iraqi front right a student,
& which of these is preferable? AMN.
BRITISH EMBASSY, 4-10

1/4

Adom 7/10
I confess that this rather
hard to follow.



LAST PAPER

BAGHDAD.

27 September 1968

R.E. 3/10.

A pity. I thought (and still do) that
your new letters were more accurate.

Manuscript Acknowledgement

Dear Donald, E11

The Ba'th

in MacLae
in R. Evans.
in Moore O/R
Reg E

R.E.

3/10.

J.R.D. 14/10

ps. 2/10

Thank you for giving us in your letter No. E 1/1 of 27 August
the opportunity to express our views on the many faces of the Ba'th,
their terminology, their doctrines and their policies.

simplification
2. I must confess I wish I could see as clearly as you appear to be
able to define, the different lines of demarcation. To do so you
have briefly rehearsed the origins of the Ba'th. I am not going to
attempt in this relatively short comment to emulate your admirably
succinct history of the party, but if any attempt is going to be made
to find true definitions it is certainly important to try to identify
the seeds that led to the conception of Ba'th thinking and what
inspired Michael Aflaq and Salah al Din Bitar to see the light in
their Parisian student digs.

3. Firstly, I recognise that Aflaq and Bitar were dedicated to the
Resurrection of the Arabs, otherwise they would not presumably have
called their brainchild the Ba'th. But what was Aflaq trying to
resurrect? At the risk of over-simplification, and I think it
essential to keep as simple a picture as possible of the Ba'th if we
are not to become hopelessly entangled in knots of meaningless so-called
ideologies and philosophies, Aflaq was trying to give birth to a new
form of Arab nationalism to emerge from the powdered ashes of past
Arab greatness. (It occurs to me that he might have called it the
Phoenix). In twentieth century terms he was extending the nationalist
movement which began to stir after the first world war, took shape in
the mid-thirties and exploded in the fifties. But he saw that a new
ingredient of socialism would have to be added to the mixture to
differentiate it from the conservative nationalism of the Pashas and
ruling cliques of the period between the two wars. The Pashas had
fought with anti-imperialist and anti-P.I.D. (Poverty, Ignorance and
Disease) slogans, but within their own prescriptions and ignoring the
weaknesses of their own system. Aflaq on the other hand was conscious
of, and honest enough to recognise, the shortcomings of Arab society,
the narrowness of their intellectual thinking, their abysmal morality,
lack of conscience, their misery and corruption. He saw these weak-
nesses for what they were, not only as weapons used by the imperialists
but of their own Arab making. The nationalism which was to emerge had
to be of a special brew, strong enough to stiffen the moral fibres of
the Arabs as a whole, not only to purge the Arab world of foreign
occupation and influence but to cleanse the Arab system of the then
ruling classes who professed equality for all, but an equality of the
Nahas Pasha and Nuri Pasha vintage which was not to go to the heads of
the middle and lower classes.

D. J. Makinson, Esq.,
Eastern Department,
Foreign Office.

LAST PAPER

/4.

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4. I think therefore that Aflaq should be credited with an uncommon Arab sense of realism. I doubt whether his call was simply that of 'off with the heads of the Aristos" à la Parisienne. Did Aflaq not see what Arabs are not normally prepared to admit, namely, that drastic surgical measures were called for? Did he not see that patience and constructive thinking are not Arab attributes when it comes to putting their own house in order, and that the only way to achieve results was to loosen the iron grip of the Pasha class on the illiterate masses? I admit that the vehicle used was revolution, but the results have not been revolutionary. The post-revolution orders do not differ very much below the surface from the old orders. But they give a sensational impression of something new: a tasty morsel to give an appetite which might develop with eating.

5. Inevitably the Ba'th immediately flirted with the Communists, but just as quickly dropped them; they took away however not only the theories of Marx but such political practices of Communism as cell organisation and clandestine and subversive activities. If the Arab countries between the two wars had been under Communist or fascist rule they would have flirted with imperialism and then dropped it when they saw that its order did not suit them. (And there I see the birth of Opportunism which is the basic tenet of Arab policy of today.) They were groping, as they are still groping, for the substance. What they were searching for was an ideology which would resurrect the greatness of the days of Arab imperialism, the Arab Conquest, the Arab Kingdom and the Islamic Empire to give them Unity, Freedom and, since Kingdom has become a dirty word, a Sovereignty with socialism as the catalytic agent to fuse all three together and bring it up to date to call it Pan-Arabism. Unity and Freedom were easily identifiable and perhaps attainable given the right conditions. But what about Socialism? The western type was too materialistic. To be truly Arab in character its Socialism had to be guided by some intangible, abstract and even abstruse Spirit. The Qoran would prove to be the appropriate source to provide the right slogan. But Michael Aflaq was a Christian and it is my belief that we might never have heard of the Ba'th if Aflaq had not had the prescience to realise that if his Movement was to exhume an iota of Arab dignity it would have to bear the stamp of Muslim respectability. So he harnessed himself to Bitar. Otherwise what self-respecting Arab would follow, with the religious fervour and revolutionary spirit required to stir his inherent apathy, the words of an infidel Greek Orthodox whose words would have been dismissed with pungent incense and idolatrous icons? But he generated the intellectual force of the idea. If Aflaq's ideas were to have any impact they would have to be forged with the steel of Islam. The only time the Arabs have achieved greatness has been at the end of a sharp sword and when they have allowed it to lose its edge they have become emasculated. Hence the Aflaq-Bitar pairing. The Ba'th movement could thus be said to be a Nationalist Movement appealing to all Arabs whatever their religion. They could say all religions were equal in the eyes of the Ba'th and that Arab Nationalism was not identified with Islam only. This at any rate was the basic theory. In practice some Ba'th think that their ideology has taken the place of Islam. But no serious Arab nationalist movement can, at least for generations if not centuries to

/come



no - it is Pan Arabist
Not the same thing. JFM

(I think this was
probably a typing
error.)
HOM

come, be led by anyone but a Muslim, and a Sunni at that. So the Ba'th is all embracing, it is Pan-Arabism. What is Pan-Arabism?

(But it has really
never been
except as a
political slogan
- e.g. Pan-
Arabism, etc.
and as a vague
drive for
improvement in the
developed
world.)
A. G. S.

6. Pan-Arabism is said to be an explosive force. But what has it produced? It substitutes wishing for thinking and if the mess the Arabs have got themselves into is anything to judge by, it has no grasp of the problems of Government, administration or finance. Wealth and technical progress do not seem to overcome the economic poverty of the Arab countries, their lack of discipline and training. In preaching the all-embracing slogans of Pan-Arabism their leaders seem to be content to exploit the psychological effects of slogans to serve their immediate aims or intentions, political or personal.

What about
the early
Caliphate?
The great days

7. I see little new in all this. It is as old as Muhammad and I see little new in the changing of the Ba'th. I submit all the above as evidence of the self-destructive characteristics of the Arab. Anyone can produce a doctrine but he does not need to adhere to it. He can wear it on his cuff - as do the Ba'th. Jealousies and rivalries not only within the Arab world, but within independent sovereign States will continue to erode any doctrine. There can be no easy identification of political parties because Arab politics are the politics of the individual and generally any appeal or loyalty is to the immediate leader as a personality and not necessarily to what he stands for politically. To achieve their aims the political leaders will stand under the standard that suits the mood, the moment and the need. It can be changed into a double or treble standard as circumstances require. It is the quintessence of Opportunism in practice. I cannot therefore draw clean and tidy lines to define the Ba'th. It is each leader for himself and policy tuned to the individual. As I see it there are ramifications within a State and within regional blocs, each order having its overtones, undertones and degrees of emphasis. The permutations are endless. I would therefore be reluctant to change the current set of names of the Ba'th because we would only have to change them again sooner or later. You admit that the divisions within the Ba'th are obscured by the struggles for personal rivalries. While professing to be of one faction of the Ba'th a leader may will be showing only one of his own faces. This perhaps explains why a Right Wing (or Orthodox) Ba'th might seem to be more extreme than the Left, as you point out at the end of para. 2 of your letter. But perhaps we should distinguish between "left" and "extreme"? One can be extreme right as well as extreme left. Perhaps extreme is a word more applicable to "means" (and also timing) rather than "ends". In any case if Ammash is an apostle of the Aflaq of yesterday, what is the Aflaq of today? I suspect he is a very disillusioned man who should have the genius to see that he was born before his time in the Arab world. Otherwise why has he not appeared since 17 July in Baghdad as the Resurrection revealing himself to the all powerful Bakr-Tikriti-Ammash trinity?

8. I personally shudder at the thought of having to try to remember what is a Ba'th Reformist or Non-Conformist, or a Neo- or Paleo- or even pseudo-Ba'thi. Given that Aflaq conceived the Ba'th philosophy, I accept that his is Orthodox and therefore Right. Any of his political progeny who have deviated from his path are Left in a party which is already Left

/of

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of Centre. My preference is still therefore for Right, Moderate and Left which is what they are fundamentally whatever soubriquet they are given. It sounds terribly conservative but I think it would avoid more confusion in an already confused situation.

9. H.M. Ambassador, who has of course had experience of the Ba'th in Syria as well as here, considers that on the whole it would not help much if we changed labels. The fact is that the present Syrian Government is even more of an abomination to conservative and middle class elements than was Hafiz, and they therefore deserve their label of left wing. The Ambassador adds that, nomenclature apart, you have raised a point of substance of considerable interest, namely, are Bakr and Takriti more willing to compromise on the principles of pure Ba'thism (by, for example, cooperating with non-Ba'thists) than Ammash, who stands for the undiluted doctrine of Aflaq? The answer probably is that they probably are prepared to cooperate in the way suggested and that Ammash is against it. There is, however, no confirmation that Aflaq has sided with Ammash over this. Incidentally, was Aflaq in favour or against the "common front" policy decided at the 1967 Beirut Conference? However that might be, there is of course a great deal of pragmatism, even outright opportunism, though, of course, honest Ba'thists also exist.

in favour

Yours Ww

Barki

(A. E. Saunders)

c.c. J. L. Y. Sanders, Esq.,
BEIRUT.

D. Crawford, Esq.,
AMMAN.

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